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ABSTRACT

This guide offers advice on the assessment of the language development abilities of bilingual preschool children. A brief review of general bilingual child language development, including mixing and loss or semilingualism, is followed by a review of current assessment practices. A language assessment procedure developed for the State of California for use with bilingual preschool children is detailed. It includes making the plan, collecting information, developing a portfolio and a narrative summary, meeting with the family and staff, and developing an appropriate curriculum. This assessment process must be repeated continually as the child develops. Using such a program will require drastic reform and, with it, a restructuring of time uses, professional staff development, accountability, and the parent-school relationship. (Contains 23 references.) (NAV)

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ASSESSING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN BILINGUAL PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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22
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1995

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Assessing Language Development in Bilingual Preschool Children

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June 1995

As more and more children enter early childhood education programs with limited proficiency in English, it becomes important for caregivers to know how to assess children's language development. This is no easy matter because children learning English as a second language come from many different circumstances and their development follows a number of different paths. Assessing the child's language development is a very important task for practitioners, especially when we think of assessment as a continual process that goes hand-in-hand with instruction.

Because it is important to consider the various forms that second-language learning can take, this paper begins with a discussion of the child's language background. We then discuss some issues in the language development of bilingual children. After that we turn to issues in the language assessment and propose a procedure for assessing language development in bilingual preschool children. This procedure was developed for the State of California to assess first and second language development.

THE CHILD'S LANGUAGE BACKGROUND[1]

There are many different ways in which children can be exposed to a second language. For some children, two languages are present in the home from birth. For other children, exposure to a second language begins once they enter early childhood education programs. It is customary in the literature to distinguish between children who learn two languages simultaneously and children who learn one language after their first language is established. Because so much of language development occurs before the age of three, the usual convention is to divide children at that point. If the second language is introduced before age three, children are thought to be learning the two languages simultaneously; after the age of three, they are engaged in sequential bilingualism (McLaughlin, 1984).

Furthermore, children differ in their exposure to their languages. Some children receive a great deal of exposure to two languages, whereas for other children one language predominates. In addition, children may be in an environment where the two languages are intermixed in normal adult speech. This practice of "code-switching" is prevalent in many Spanish-speaking communities in California and Texas. Moreover, in migrant Latino families, children may move from one country to another, so that there is a great deal of exposure to English as a second language at some periods, and no exposure at other times.

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[1] A fuller discussion of the first two sections in this paper can be found in *Fostering the development of first and second language in early childhood: Resource guide.* The resource guide is part of a comprehensive training package currently being developed by the Santa Cruz Office of Education for the California Department of Education, Child Development Division, Sacramento, CA. Robert Cervantes, Assistant Superintendent of this division, conceived this project. The authors are indebted to Marcia Meyer and Dale Zevin of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and to the project's advisory board for their support throughout this project.

At the risk of simplifying these complexities we offer in Table 1 a typology of conditions of language exposure and use by bilingual children. In this table, Type 1 bilingualism represents the case of children who are simultaneously bilingual in the sense that both languages develop equally or nearly equally as they are exposed to both and have good opportunities to use both. Although perfectly balanced bilinguals are rare, many children in early childhood education programs have been exposed to two languages and use both. For example, many children speak Spanish with their parents and older relatives, but English with their siblings and other children.

Type 2 represents children who have had high exposure to a second language throughout their lives, but have had little opportunity to use the language. For example, many migrant children from Mexico hear English on television, in stores and so on, but use Spanish in

Table 1

A Typology of Bilingual Development Based on Conditions of Exposure and Use

Prior Experience	Subsequent Experience: High opportunity/ motivation for use of both languages	Subsequent Experience: Low opportunity/ motivation for use of one language
High exposure to both languages	Simultaneous Bilingualism (Type 1)	Receptive Bilingualism (Type 2)
Low exposure to one language	Rapid Sequential Bilingualism (Type 3)	Slow Sequential Bilingualism (Type 4)

everyday communication. When they enter early childhood education programs, these children are likely to make rapid progress in English because their comprehension skills have been developed.

Types 3 and 4 represent children who are learning a second language sequentially, that is, after the first language is established. Type 3 children have also had little exposure to English before entering early childhood education programs, but they use English as much as they can and so are likely to be more rapid learners than are Type 4 children. In the case of Type 4

children, there has been little prior exposure to English and they have few opportunities—or avail themselves of few opportunities—to use English.

Individual differences in the use children make of the opportunities to use a second language have been noted by many observers. Some children not only use the language as much as possible, but they are "high input generators" in the sense that they get people around them to use English in ways that are most helpful to their learning. Other children tend not to use the language very much and as a result do not get as much help as they could. We will return to the issue of individual differences in the next section.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN BILINGUAL CHILDREN

Most educators know something about the language development of native English-speaking children. There is a vast literature on the topic, and the benchmarks of language development have been plotted for monolingual children; however, no such benchmarks are available for bilingual children. Children follow different paths to become bilingual and the stages that they pass through can be quite varied.

Stages of Development

Currently researchers believe that there is a consistent developmental sequence that children follow in acquiring a first language. If the child acquires two languages simultaneously, the stages of development are the same as they are for monolingual speakers of those languages. There is debate over whether bilingualism results in a slower rate of vocabulary development than is true of children learning the same languages monolingually. Goodz (1994) reports no delay or retardation, but other researchers have reported lower vocabulary scores for bilingual than for monolingual children in a given language (Bialystok, 1988; Doyle, Champagne, and Segalowitz, 1978).

Typically, children who are learning two languages simultaneously make unequal progress in the languages. One language is more salient from time to time, either because of the input that the child is receiving from other speakers, or because there are more opportunities to use one language than the other. However, there is no simple relationship between a child's proficiency in each language and the amount of input in that language from caregivers and others (Goodz, 1994).

For children who are learning a second language sequentially, the development progression is somewhat different. Tabors and Snow (1994) argue that such children pass through four distinct stages:

1.) First, the child uses the home language. When everyone around the child is speaking a different language, there are only two options—to speak the language they already know, or to stop speaking entirely. Many children, but not all, follow the first option for some period of time (Saville-Troike, 1987). This of course leads to increasing frustration, and eventually children give up trying to make others understand their language.

2.) The second stage is the nonverbal period. After children abandon the attempt to communicate in their first language, they enter a period in which they do not talk at all. This can last for some time, or it can be a brief phase. Although they do not talk during this time,

children attempt to communicate nonverbally to get help from adults or to obtain objects. Furthermore, this is a period during which children begin actively to crack the code of the second language. Saville-Troike (1987) noted that children will rehearse the target language by repeating what other speakers say in a low voice and by playing with the sounds of the new language.

3.) The next stage occurs when the child is ready to go public with the new language. There are two characteristics to this speech—it is telegraphic and it involves the use of formulas. Telegraphic speech is common in early monolingual language development and involves the use of a few content words without function words or morphological markers. For example, a young child learning to speak English may say "put paper" to convey the meaning, "I want to put the paper on the table." Formulaic speech refers to the use of unanalyzed chunks of words or routine phrases that are repetitions of what the child hears. Children use such prefabricated chunks long before they have any understanding of what they mean (Wong Fillmore, 1976).

4.) Eventually, the child reaches the stage of productive language use. At this point the child is able to go beyond short telegraphic utterances and memorized chunks. Initially, children may form new utterances by using formulaic patterns such as "I wanna" with names for objects. In time, the child begins to demonstrate an understanding of the syntactic system of the language. Children gradually unpackage their formulas and apply newly acquired syntactic rules to develop productive control over the language.

Like any scheme of developmental stages, the sequence outlined here is flexible. At a given stage children have recourse to previously used strategies. Formulaic speech is still used in the stage of productive language use, for example. Rather than speaking of stages, it makes more sense to speak of waves, in that waves can be visualized as moving in and out, generally moving in one direction, but receding, then moving forward again (Olsen Edwards, personal communication, 1994). This seems to capture more accurately the child's development—in language and in other areas as well.

Furthermore, there are vast individual differences with respect to the rate at which children pass through the different stages. Some children go through a prolonged nonverbal stage, sometimes lasting for a year or more, whereas other children pass through this stage so quickly they seem to have rejected this strategy altogether. Nora, in Wong Fillmore's (1976) study, preferred to interact with English-speaking children and used every opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation in that language. Other learners in the same study chose to speak almost entirely with other children who understood their first language and so made little progress in the second language.

Language Mixing

Most observers of children learning two languages simultaneously note that there is some mixing of languages at the lexical level. There is a great deal of controversy about how much mixing occurs and what it means. Recent research by Goodz (1994) suggests that mixing increases somewhat during early childhood, peaking at 30 months or so, and then declining. She followed 13 children and their parents and focused on the input the parents provided. In

spite of parents' protestations to the contrary, observations indicated that they did not separate languages by person; rather, in all cases there were situations when parents used their nonnative language with the child. This research was done with French-English speakers in Canada; research with Mexican-American families in the United States indicates mixing is quite common in some communities.

In such communities mixing languages and switching from one language to another is part of the child's normal linguistic environment. Language mixing and code switching are used for definite communicative needs. Speakers build on the coexistence of alternate forms in their language repertory to create meanings that may be highly idiosyncratic and understood only by members of the same bilingual speech community. In such communities adult code-switching is a rhetorical strategy used in such communicative tasks as persuading, explaining, requesting, and controlling. It is preferred to other rhetorical devices because it has greater semantic power deriving from metaphorical allusion to shared values and to the bilinguals' common problems vis-a-vis the society at large.

A number of observers have noted that when bilinguals have been interacting mainly with other bilinguals for a long time, the model for each of their languages is not monolingual usage of these languages but rather the languages as spoken by the bilinguals themselves. In these situations, the mixed speech becomes a code of its own—"contact language" (Haugen, 1953) that is used to stress in-group behavior or emphasize informality or rapport.

It is important for educators in early childhood education programs to realize that language mixing (inserting single lexical items from one language into another) and code switching (switching languages for at least a phrase or a sentence)—are common linguistic devices in many of the communities from which their students come. Rather than indicating that children are confusing their two languages, such phenomena can be a sign of linguistic vitality. Young children in such communities are in the process of learning to switch languages in the sophisticated manner they hear around them. Teachers who switch languages are merely adjusting their speech to the language of the child's community and culture.

Language Loss and Semilingualism

It sometimes happens that children lose their first language skills as the second language begins to predominate (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Because of the emphasis put on English in our schools and society, children can gradually lose aspects of their first language. This is sometimes the case in immigrant families, where the parents are learning English and that language begins to predominate in the home.

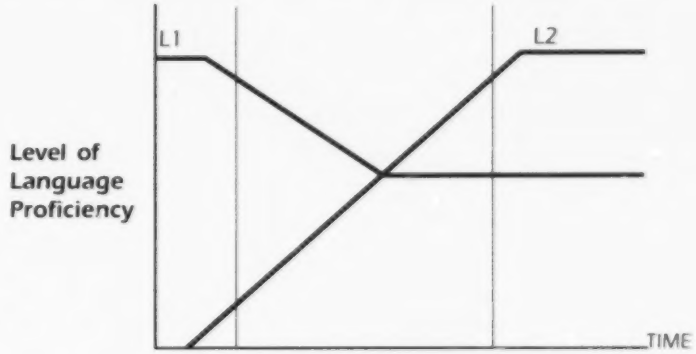
Because, developmentally, children may be losing aspects of their first language as the second language is acquired, their performance on tests of language proficiency can be misleading. At a given point in time, their skills in both languages may be relatively weak. This has led some researchers to talk of "semilingualism," a condition where children are not functioning well in either language. Indeed, one often hears teachers decrying the fact that bilingual children "don't know either language."

Most linguists would restrict the use of the term "semilingualism" to those cases where extreme social deprivation results in bilingual children not functioning well in either language.

Although instances of extreme linguistic and communicative deprivation may lead to language pathology, usually what appears to be semilingualism is only a temporary phase in language development. Thus, as shown in Figure 1, there may be a developmental period when lack of use of the first language results in a decline in proficiency while at the same time knowledge of the second language is not yet at an age-appropriate level.

Figure 1

Semilingualism as a function of declining proficiency in the first language and less than adequate proficiency in the second



The concept of semilingualism is not a useful way to refer to this developmental phase because, even though a bilingual child's performance in either language may lag behind that of monolingual speakers of the language at some point in development, the child may actually possess a total vocabulary and total linguistic repertory that is quite similar to that of monolingual speakers. Rather, this occurrence may be more appropriately described as a language imbalance, where at certain points in the development of their languages bilingual children do not perform as well as native speakers in either language. There may be shifts back and forth in which language is more proficient, depending on language use and exposure, but most bilingual children are able eventually to come up to age-level proficiency in both languages given more exposure and opportunities for use of the weaker language.

To summarize, bilingual language development can follow a number of different patterns. Especially for sequential bilinguals (Types 3 and 4), there is often imbalance in the child's languages as one or the other language predominates. For certain children language mixing and code-switching are part of the linguistic repertory. Educators in early childhood education programs need to be sensitive to these complexities in bilingual language development. This does not mean that language assessment is impossible, but it does mean that extra sensitivity is required.

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Although our society puts a high value on test outcomes, they are often suspect. Garcia and Figueroa (in press) outlined the tests most commonly given to young children in preschool settings. They examined these tests for predictive ability and validity. Among the eleven most widely used tests of school readiness, most have only adequate validity or worse and all have weaknesses of some sort. In spite of the high status of tests in our society, the perception of tests as objective, scientific, and useful is not consistent with the facts regarding language minority children.

Instead, there is the illusion of objectivity. Because the tests are used to predict a child's success or failure in an instructional sequence or program, predictive criterion-referenced validity is important. Yet the tests do not achieve adequate levels of validity. Because tests are used to make decisions about individual placement, the highest standards of technical excellence are required. Because of their psychometric weakness, there are currently no appropriate tests to assess school readiness for children with limited English proficiency (Salvia and Ysseldyke, 1988).

Guidelines for Assessing Bilingual Children

Given the weakness of current assessment procedures and the multifaceted context of learning for culturally and linguistically diverse children, what principles should guide the design of appropriate assessment instruments? We suggest the following:

Assessment must be developmentally and culturally appropriate. In addition to taking into account the social and cognitive aspects of development (Bredekamp, 1987), appropriate assessment for language minority children must take into consideration the unique cultural aspects that affect how children learn and relate to other people (Derman-Sparks, and ABC Task Force, 1989). The adult who probes for elaborate speech may elicit culturally appropriate ways of responding rather than test-appropriate ways of answering. Nonverbal cues may be read incorrectly by the child who comes from another cultural background (Lynch and Hanson, 1992). If, as Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihls (1986) claim, the act of testing is a complex social activity, it is imperative to take care to avoid interpretations and prescriptions that are culturally biased and potentially harmful to the individual being assessed.

The child's bilingual linguistic background must be taken into consideration in any authentic assessment of oral language proficiency. Bilingualism is a complex concept and includes individuals with a broad range of speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending abilities in each language. Furthermore, these abilities are constantly in flux. The conditions of language dominance are quickly altered, especially in children who return to their family's country of origin on a regular basis. Furthermore, some bilingual children also code-switch, as is demanded by the social context. The goal must be to assess the child's language or languages without standardizing performance, allowing children to demonstrate what they can do in their own unique ways. Assessment must be accompanied by a strong professional development component that focuses on the use of narrative reporting, observations of language development, and

sampling the child's language abilities. Teachers and staff need to learn what developmentally appropriate outcomes can be expected based on research in first and second language learning. In particular, they need to know the variety of ways in which children develop a second language.

A fully contextual account of the child's language skills requires the involvement of parents and family members, the students themselves, teachers, and staff in providing a detailed picture of the context of language learning and the resources that are available to the child (Nissani, 1990). What is called for is a description of the child's language environment, of the extent to which significant others—adults or children—provide language assistance by modeling, expanding, restating, repeating, questioning, prompting, negotiating meaning, cueing, pausing, praising, and providing visual and other supports. Assessment of the child needs to take into account the entire context in which the child is learning and developing.

Instructionally Embedded Assessment

Because of the limitations of current assessment procedures, there is a growing consensus that the way to assess bilingual children in early childhood education programs is through a portfolio assessment procedure that is developmentally appropriate, linguistically multifaceted, and contextual (Meisels, 1991; Navarrete, Wilde, Nelson, Martinez, and Hargett, 1990; Valdez Pierce and O'Malley, 1992). Such an approach uses performance samples and observational methods to gain a full picture of the child's language abilities and emergent literacy learning.

In order for such an approach to be developmentally appropriate, it must allow for the fact that bilingual language development can follow a number of different paths. A child entering an early childhood education program can have a strong receptive knowledge of a second language (Type 2), can have learned the second language simultaneously with another language and be fairly balanced in both (Type 1), or can have little knowledge of the second language on entering the program (Types 3 and 4). What is developmentally appropriate for one child is not necessarily appropriate for another.

The procedure must also be culturally appropriate in the sense that there is recognition of the cultural differences between bilingual and mainstream children. Latino or Asian children may have learned different ways of interacting with other children than have monolingual English-speaking children. Children from some cultures learn that it is inappropriate to initiate conversations with adults, to engage with other children competitively, or to look directly at adults. Some children require longer "wait times" before they answer an adult's question. Delay or apparent hesitancy in learning new language skills may actually reflect the difficulties bilingual children have in adapting to new cultural ways of interacting.

The method used to assess the bilingual child's language abilities should be informal, based on performance samples and observations (Navarrete et al., 1990). Young children, and especially children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, have not been socialized to the activity of test taking. Rigidly standardized procedures seriously

underestimate a child's capability. Instead, the teacher can use performance samples and observations to make decisions about individual children that are ecologically consistent with the nature of early childhood learning and instruction. The data must be systematic and developmental, so that the teacher knows what progress the child is making (Herrell, 1990).

In addition, because of the current emphasis on emergent literacy in early childhood (Abramson, Seda, and Johnson, 1990; Teale, 1988), it would be beneficial to examine in the context of the child's overall language development, the acquisition of emergent literacy skills, such as knowledge of the functions of written language, emergent storybook reading abilities, writing strategies, and knowledge of letter-sound correspondences (Teale, 1988). By sampling the child's behavior and through structured observations, teachers can begin to develop a picture of the child's growth in various aspects of language and literacy.

In the current school reform effort, assessment and teaching go hand-in-hand (Herrell, 1990). Assessment should be continuous. When the teacher uses assessments that are an integral part of a classroom activity, it becomes possible to see if the child has learned from the activity. Assessment that informs instruction and follows from it is ecologically valid and pedagogically useful. The model of assessment that we are advocating involves a feedback loop in which assessment is "instructionally embedded." Assessment is intrinsically linked to program goals and affects instructional practice. Such a model is consistent with current thinking about assessment and is appropriate for the needs of language minority children.

Program goals that are based on developmentally and culturally appropriate guidelines influence both instructional practice and ongoing assessment. Assessment and instruction are seen to interact. Rather than sitting children down to take one-shot tests, the teacher is constantly observing what her children can and cannot do at different times and in different contexts and adjusting her instruction accordingly. This is what happens normally in early childhood education programs where developmentally appropriate instruction is occurring.

The teacher's running record of the child's growth in each child's portfolio becomes the basis for conferences with parents in which the teacher can document the child's development. The use of authentic assessments will assist the parents in understanding the child's development and how the curriculum furthers that development. Rather than scores on a test that the parents do not understand, the use of instructionally embedded assessment helps parents see what the goals of the early childhood education program are.

In short, current thinking about assessment practices for language minority children leads to the conclusion that assessment should be instructionally embedded. Especially for children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, the use of scripted, standardized, norm-referenced measures is inappropriate. Observations and performance sampling at different times and in different contexts allow these children to demonstrate their growth and language competencies.

THE CALIFORNIA EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW

We turn now to a suggested procedure for assessing bilingual preschool children's language development. While this process can be used for all children, it was especially designed to address the needs of children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. It is called The California Early Language Development Assessment Process,[2] and is a systematic and ongoing record of the preschool child's growth and development in oral language proficiency.

The California Early Language Development Assessment Process is a process, not an instrument, because it is ongoing and continuous, not something administered at a particular point in time. Furthermore, there is room for flexibility to meet local needs. It is assumed that teachers and aides at early childhood development centers will modify the process to their own program.

There are six steps to the process. Because the process is ongoing, it is represented as a circle. Once one round of the circle is completed, another begins.

Figure 2

The California Early Language Development Assessment Process

Step 1: Making a Plan
Step 2: Collecting Information
Step 3: Portfolio
Step 4: Narrative Statement
Step 5: Sharing with Family and Staff
Step 6: Curriculum Development

[2] A fuller account of this procedure can be found in the Resource Guide, *Assessing first and second language development in early childhood*, Child Development Division of the California Department of Education, Sacramento CA. Robert Cervantes, Assistant Superintendent of this division, conceived this project. The authors are indebted to Marcia Meyer and Dale Zevin of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and to the project's advisory board for their support throughout this project.

Step 1: Making a Plan

Developing a plan for successful appropriate assessment is not easy. A common mistake is to try to do too much at once. There are several guidelines that will make the planning process easier.

- Make sure that teachers and staff understand the process. The staff in most child development programs is overworked and underpaid. Unless the staff clearly understand the goals and purposes of the assessment process, it is too much to expect that they will enthusiastically embrace what they can easily perceive as another burden. The goal is to help each child to develop fully his or her language competence.
- Make assessment a part of everyday activity. Decide what will work best for your particular site. Make it easy to gather information and take notes. The staff should get used to jotting down observations about individual children. One strategy is to use "post-its" that can easily be put in the child's portfolio.
- Capture the variety of the children's uses of language. An appropriate assessment of language development must reflect the various ways in which language is used by children—to make requests, to provide information, to achieve goals, to entertain, to gain attention, and settle disputes.
- Be sure to pay attention to all children. The danger is that the quiet ones will be ignored. Even if a child is not saying anything, the teacher needs to record how well the child understands what is said and whether he or she can respond appropriately to language. This is especially important with children learning a second language, who may be going through the "nonverbal period." During this time they may not speak much, but their understanding is developing.

There are three steps in the planning process—clearly defining the what, the when, and the how. Each of these requires careful consideration.

THE WHAT. There needs to be clarity about what information is to be gathered. Table 2 shows recommended categories of language use for observation. Note that what is assessed is not the components of language but rather how language is used. It is more realistic for busy teachers and staff to make comments on how the child is using the language—including samples of the child's speech—than to decide whether pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar are developmentally appropriate. It is important to remember that for bilingual children, the staff must observe the development of each of the child's languages.

THE WHEN. Finding time can be a problem. Because everyone is so busy and there are so many other demands on the staff's time, it is best to select two to four children who are the target children for a week. Initially, only a few observations should be made per day. Once the staff is in the habit of making observations, it will be easier to collect more.

It is important to remember that family members are often a valuable source of information about the preschool child's language. Parents or other family members can be asked about the child's language when they drop the child off in the morning or pick the child up at the end of the day. Once they are asked about the child's language, family members will "learn to see" as they pay increasing attention to the child's language.

Table 2

California Early Language Development Assessment Process: Categories of Language Use

Use of language to **express feelings**—for example: to express anger to apologize to express joy, pleasure	Use of language to **express ideas**—for example: about how to do class projects about nature, how the world functions about using objects, toys, and tools	Use of language to **ask for help**—for example: when hurt when trying to solve a problem when working on a class project
Use of language to **engage in fantasy play**—for example: in playing a role taking turns keeping the fantasy going	Use of language to **describe**—for example: when telling an original story when recounting past experiences in retelling what was read when describing a picture or photo	Use of language to **solve a problem**—for example: to resolve conflict with another child to solve a problem that occurs during a class project, during fantasy play
Use of language for **private speech**—for example: playing with language in speech to oneself rhyming words, chanting punning	Use of language to **inquire**—for example: asking for names of things asking how something works asking "why" questions	

Often things happen so fast that it is difficult for the staff member to write down what the child said. Sometimes it is possible to take brief notes and write a more full description later. For example, the teacher or aide might write down what the child said and fill in a description of the context later.

THE HOW. A common mistake is to try to do too much at once. From two to four children should be selected for observation by all staff members each week. By planning carefully, all children can ultimately be observed in various contexts over the course of a year. This brings us to the next step in the process.

Step 2: Collecting Information

The guiding principle in collecting information should be simplicity and ease of use. As educators move away from standardized tests toward more authentic, instructionally embedded instruments, it is necessary to choose procedures that yield meaningful and useful information.

OBSERVATIONS. The richest source of information about the child's language is observations. One disadvantage of observations is that they require focused attention and are difficult to carry out while interacting with children. If the plan for observations is a reasonable one, however, it should be possible for staff to develop a comfortable pattern to meet the plan's requirements.

Here are some examples of notes on individual children:

Jose (four years old):
Context: Jose was playing with his friend Miguel.
Observation: Jose switches languages constantly and seems comfortable in both.

Maria (five years old):
Context: Maria was playing doctor with two other children in the dramatic play area.
Observation: She was very talkative and engaged in Spanish, but when the other children switched to English, Maria stopped talking.

Jack (three years old):
Context: Jack was talking to his teacher.
Observation: He uses language in original ways. Today he said, "I help you spoon the soup."

Note that the observation notes can relate to any aspects of language, not just those listed in the categories. They can be quite extensive records of an interaction the child was involved in or may be simply a one-line note on an aspect of language such as pronunciation. They can also be direct quotations of things the child says.

PROMPTED RESPONSES. A limitation of observations is that it sometimes happens that what one is looking for does not occur naturally. It is sometimes necessary to talk with children, ask them questions, or prompt them to do something to demonstrate the language skills that the teacher or aide is interested in observing. For example, children might not tell stories naturally. It may be necessary to set up a situation and ask the child to tell a story or recount some event that he or she has experienced. This can be done in several ways, one of which would be to have the child interact with puppets who ask the child to tell them a story before they go to sleep.

Prompted responses are more efficient in that the teacher does not have to wait until a child spontaneously tells a story or uses vocabulary items. Instead these informal "prompts" provide authentic information about the child's abilities and about whether they can apply what they know appropriately. The staff member can use the observation form or simply make notes on the child's responses to such prompts. These notes then go in the portfolio with other observations.

PRODUCTS OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES. Another source of information about a child's language development comes from activities such as stories told to the teacher (dictated stories). Such a product can be written down by the teacher or audiotaped and saved for later analysis. A child's poems can provide information about the child's vocabulary, ability to use language in creative ways, and capacity to rhyme words. Children's art work can be a source of information about language development if children are asked to describe their picture to the teacher, to another child or a puppet.

INFORMATION FROM PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS. Information about the preschool child's language development can come from informal or more structured interactions with parents and other family members. On occasion, it is helpful to have specific questions to ask the parent about the child's language. These may validate observations from the classroom or provide more information, for example, about language development in a home language that is not used in the preschool.

More informal discussions with parents can also provide helpful information. Parents are pleased to have an opportunity to talk about their children. Such exchanges provide information that the teacher may not otherwise know—about a family member who has died or about another event that might affect the child's behavior and mood in preschool.

It is important that the staff member put aside time to write notes from these informal and more formal contacts with parents and family members. This is critical information for the child's portfolio and for staff meetings where curriculum activities are planned.

Step 3: The Portfolio

The concept of a "portfolio" comes from the arts. The artist's portfolio is a collection of paintings, photographs, sculptures, and so forth that represents the artist's work. The child's portfolio is a record over time of the child's development. It contains various sources of information. In the California Early Language Development Assessment Process, the portfolio contains information about the child's language development as reflected in the kinds of information gathered. The portfolio provides a picture of the child's unique capabilities and accomplishments. Portfolios have been compared to photo albums. They refresh our memories of the past, show how the child has changed over time, and serve as a way of familiarizing a new person (staff member) with the child.

The role of the portfolio is critical. Portfolios are the key link in achieving the basic purposes of classroom assessment: determining children's status and progress, guiding classroom activities and curriculum, providing information for reporting and communication, and suggesting which children might benefit from special help (McAfee and Leong, 1994). Here are some examples of information about language development to include in the portfolio:

- Staff observations in the form of notes or forms.
- Notes from situations where the child is prompted to tell a story, engaging in dramatic play, and the like.
- Products such as poems or stories that the child dictates.
- Formal and informal information from parents and other family members.

Staff involved in the portfolio process should receive information and training on what is appropriate to put in the portfolio. Initially, it is probably best to err on the side of caution and use any anecdotal information that the staff wants to include. Later, as the cycle of assessment becomes part of the routine of the program, the staff will learn which observations will be helpful in making future decisions about curriculum activities.

With bilingual children, it is important to make sure that there is information about language development in both languages. This means that staff, including aides and volunteers who speak the language of the child, must make contributions to the portfolio—even if their time in the center is limited. All staff members need to contribute to the portfolio.

Step 4: Narrative Summary

Portfolios provide an ongoing, many-sided and comprehensive statement about the child. Because they contain so much information, it is important to review the material in the portfolio regularly. Narrative summary statements should be made regularly—at least every few months—after reviewing staff observational notes, child's products, and material from parent and family members. The narrative summary is revised periodically. It is a systematic and ongoing record of the child's growth and development in the language area.

These summary statements become part of the portfolio and are used in staff and parent meetings. They become the basis for decisions about curriculum modifications to fit the needs of individual children or groups of children.

Writing narrative statements that summarize a child's language development requires skill and experience. In making periodic summaries about the child's language development, the teacher needs to rely on understandings and insights that come from experience in working with young children. The teacher has to combine information from observations and other sources with judgment and intuition. Because assessment is closely tied to instructional process, there are always implications for classroom activities and curriculum. Following are some examples of narrative statements.

The first is a four-year-old child, Antonio Ramirez, who has been in a bilingual program for nine months:

> *Antonio Ramirez is quite fluent in English. He enjoys speaking English and loves to participate in activities with English-speaking children. He makes mistakes in his word order and his pronunciation is still developing. Antonio never uses Spanish in the center, but his parents report that he uses Spanish at home and that he is fluent in Spanish.*

Thu Tran is a three-year-old Vietnamese immigrant who has been in the center for a year. Her narrative statement reads:

> *Thu went through a long nonverbal period and now is using various English phrases and expressions picked up from daily routines. She tends to prefer to interact with the adults at the center rather than with other children. Her brother says that her Vietnamese is fine. Her parents report that she talks a lot at home and has no apparent problems with her first language development.*

Michael Chang is two and a half. He has been in the center for six months:

> *Michael Chang uses English infrequently. Observations of his play interactions with other children indicate that he is quiet and uses nonverbal methods of communicating. He tends to play with the same few children and is rather shy with adults. He has developed a few phrases which he uses in one-on-one interactions with other children. He seems to understand English well as is indicated by his ability to follow directions and respond to help. However, he only seems to understand when the teacher's language is simple and slow enough for him to understand what is being said. A Chinese-speaking aide reports that his Chinese is well developed. When she is together with him and the other Chinese-speaking children, Michael talks a great deal and displays a marvelous sense of humor, especially in his play with words.*

Step 5: Meeting with Family and Staff

The next step involves separate meetings with family members and staff. The purpose of these meetings is to review information from the portfolio and the narrative summary and to discuss what instructional strategies and activities would be best for the child. These meetings are an essential part of the assessment process. Enough time should be allowed for thoughtful consideration of assessment information and discussion about how to use this information. Otherwise, the insights and information gained will be lost in the rush of everyday program activities.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS. In the current view of assessment, communication with parents begins long before a parent conference is held. Parent involvement should begin in the assessment planning stage through task forces or advisory panels and the like. Parents should be informed about changes in the assessment plan and their reactions to forms and procedures should be solicited throughout the year.

An advantage of authentic assessment in communicating with parents is that the information that has been gathered speaks for itself (McAfee and Leong, 1994). The portfolio might contain evidence of a child's growing control of a second language based on observations of interactions with other children and adults. There might be an audio tape of a story the child told in English.

As parents and teachers go through the portfolio together, there are opportunities for parents to ask questions and share their own experiences. The teacher can gain considerable insight into the child by listening carefully to parent responses and reports on their experiences with the child. Important information about the child's use of language can be gained from parent conferences, especially when the language used in the child development program is different from the language used at home.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF. Regular staff meetings—every week is ideal—are a critical element in the assessment process. In these meetings the full picture of a child's language development emerges. Information from the parents can be compared with what the staff has observed. The observations of different staff members can be compared and discussed.

It can happen that different staff members have very different perceptions of the same child. These need to be discussed fully. For example, it may be that the aide who works with the child in the home language on certain days of the week has a different view of the child's development than does an aide who works with the child in the same language on different days. It may not always be possible to reconcile these different views. It may be the case that the child reacts differently to one person than to another.

Staff input is essential for the summaries of the portfolio. Often observational notes are written hurriedly and in a shorthand fashion. It is important for the teacher who writes the narrative summaries to clearly understand the meaning of the observational notes written by other staff. Products of children's work should be discussed by all staff. Often the insights of staff members will lead to very different overall interpretations of the child's language development from what the teacher initially held. The periodic narrative summaries for each child should be available for staff to review and comment on.

In these staff meetings, the curriculum implications of assessment become realized. Through discussion it becomes apparent what activities or environmental enhancements can be presented to foster oral language development for particular children or groups of children. The staff needs to consider in detail how these modifications will be made and who will be responsible for assuring they happen. This brings us to the final step in the process.

Step 6: Curriculum Development

A major purpose of assessment is to provide teachers with information on the language development of individual children. This information helps them to plan developmentally appropriate activities that promote further growth. As Bredenkamp pointed out, assessment information "is essential for planning and implementing developmentally appropriate programs" (1987, p. 4). If used correctly, assessment helps teachers decide how long to work on a given goal or objective, when to review material, and when to make changes in curriculum.

Effective teachers are constantly using informal assessments of their children to guide classroom activities and curriculum. If teachers see that a child or group of children does not understand the activity, they are likely to put time aside to work with that child or group individually or adapt the activity to be more appropriate to the child's developmental needs. Or they may set up cooperative groups of mixed abilities, so that children who have mastered a certain task can work with children who are still learning.

These adjustments are part of regular preschool activities and curriculum. They result from the teacher's perceptions of what children are capable of and what they need. Authentic assessment is simply a systematic attempt to use the assessment process to benefit curriculum and learning.

If the preschool teacher feels that a certain child is not developing his or her language skills as well as other children, it might be necessary to refer the child to a speech and language therapist, a hearing specialist, or another specialist. It is important to realize, as we noted earlier, that children learning a second language may go through a developmental process in which, at a certain point, both languages are underdeveloped. Many children pass through this phase and become proficient in one language or the other.

Here are some examples of the assessment–curriculum interaction.

Kim Loo

Narrative summary. After eight months of exposure to English, three-year old Kim is usually silent when she interacts with other children or adults. She is eager to participate in group activities but uses nonverbal means almost entirely. She is alert and attentive, but does not pay attention to signs or written materials in English. Her comprehension of English is improving. She follows directions well and understands short statements and commands in English. According to her parents, Kim speaks and understands her home language, Taiwanese, as would be expected of a child her age.

Instructional strategy. The teacher decided to use the daily routines of the program to strengthen Kim's English. Because of the repetitive and concrete nature of many everyday routines, they are ideal for helping children acquire vocabulary and word patterns. The staff labeled activities for Kim by talking to her and giving her the words for the activities: "It's snack time. We are having our snacks now. Ready for your snack, Kim?" The teacher also tries to involve Kim in choral activities with other children, such as reciting poems and rhymes. To develop her Taiwanese, the teacher has a Taiwanese-speaking aide read to Kim and other children whose home language is Taiwanese.

Tony Martinez

Narrative summary. Tony is quite advanced in his English for a four-year old child. He still has some problems finding the right word and his pronunciation is still developing, but he speaks English fluently and loves to participate in activities with English-speaking children. He uses Spanish at home and his parents say that his Spanish is also developing well.

Instructional strategy. The staff decides to encourage Tony to be involved in dramatic play to increase his English vocabulary. Tony rarely chooses dramatic play. The teacher knows Tony's father is a carpenter and Tony loves woodworking activities. The staff sets up a dramatic play area with tools and other carpentry props. To assist in Tony's Spanish language development, the teacher also gives Tony's older sister, who is quite fluent in Spanish, some Spanish books to read with him at home.

Vicki Tamura

Narrative summary. Five-year-old Vicki's English is developing well. She recalls stories read to her and can retell the stories accurately. She is beginning to show interest in print and pays attention to signs and labels. The Japanese-speaking aide is quite pleased with her Japanese language skills.

Instructional strategy. Because Vicki enjoys stories, the teacher decides to involve Vicki in storytelling activities. With a small group of other kindergarten children,

Vicki thinks of ideas to include in group stories. Each child is asked to tell part of the story to the teacher who will read it to the rest of the class. To foster her bilingual development, the teacher encourages Vicki's parents to continue her after school and Saturday Japanese classes.

Authentic assessment can be a valuable tool for fostering first- and second-language development. Through their experience with young children, teachers can think of many ways to modify their instruction to fit the child's needs. By showing respect for the child's language and culture and by using assessment to inform instruction, teachers in child development centers can build programs that are culturally and developmentally appropriate.

CONCLUSION

Once the six steps are finished, the process begins anew. The goals defined in the next plan will be different, because of the information gained in the first round of the process. The child will have new activities to support his or her growth. Different aspects of a child's language development may be important the next time the process is implemented.

Obviously, developing a procedure such as the one described above requires a commitment on the part of all parties. The usual objection is that there just is not enough time. Where is a busy staff to find the time to make observations, to write them down, to make up a portfolio, to talk with family members about the child's language development, to meet and write summary statements, to meet and discuss curriculum changes? These are serious concerns that cannot be taken lightly.

In fact, *the only way this kind of assessment can take place is if there is a commitment to reform.* A drastic restructuring is necessary in 1) the uses of time, 2) staff professional development, 3) accountability, and 4) relationships with parents.

THE USES OF TIME. For the kind of authentic assessment we have described, there has to be a fundamental rethinking of how time is used by center staff. There has to be a new conceptualization of what the staff person's role is. In a certain sense, all staff become researchers—gathering data on their students that are then used to inform curriculum. This is a new role for staff. It will require some adjustment for them to think of themselves as observer-researchers.

A major part of this adjustment is the requirement to put time aside to make observations and to record them in the children's portfolios. This time has to come from other activities. Staff have to be able to step back and "see," and children need to adjust to the teacher making observations. Children may become curious when a staff member takes notes about their behavior. McAfee and Leong (1994) recommend the following responses: "I'm keeping track of what we've learned and have yet to learn" or "I do this to help me teach better." Saying something like this may help the children understand that the staff member needs quiet time to watch what is happening in the classroom.

Time also has to be found for meetings with parents and staff to discuss individual children and to plan curriculum changes. These meetings are key to the success of the assessment enterprise and to the center generally. If directors and staff look carefully at how

staff meetings are run and how time is spent at these meetings, they will often find that a great deal of time is wasted that could be used to discuss individual children and their competencies and needs.

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Serious reform also requires professional development. Especially in situations where staff are dealing with children who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it is critical that staff have information about language development in general and second-language development in particular.

The kind of information presented in the first part of this paper is especially important for successful reform and assessment. Staff also need information on what steps are to be taken when there are children with particular needs. Staff need to understand the course of normal language development and what to expect of children at particular ages. They need to be able to determine when there are enough warning signs to suggest that a child is in need of referral. This requires an appreciation for age-appropriate developmental patterns.

Part of professional development has to do with learning to "see." Over time, staff who take observational notes of children inevitably start seeing more and more, and develop a sense for what is important for understanding a child's development and what is not. They also learn over time what information will be helpful for future modification of the curriculum. There is a learning curve here—as staff engage in authentic assessment, they become better at it.

ACCOUNTABILITY. A key element of reform is accountability. Program goals need to be clearly spelled out and procedures need to be developed to determine whether those goals are being realized. An assessment procedure such as was outlined above forces programs to be clear about their goals in the planning stage. In some cases the program will focus on developing proficiency in English; in other cases the focus will be on home language development. In many programs, the goal will be to develop both languages. Authentic assessment furthers program accountability because of its impact on instruction. Assessment means more than taking a snapshot of the child at a given point in time. Current thinking about assessment uses the metaphor of a video, in which a picture is given of how the child is developing across many points in time. These methods give a clearer picture of the ebb and flow of development, and help staff to formulate curricular modifications.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS. Such assessment also provides a way of involving parents in the development of their children. It is important that parents understand the rationale behind authentic assessment and the benefits that this approach carries with it. Parents need to hear how assessment and curriculum development are reflected in the activities the child development program provides for children. Consideration must be given to involve parents who do not speak English. If the teacher does not speak their language, an aide, parent, or older child who speaks the language might act as a translator.

It is important to be sensitive to the impact of what is said on the family and on the child. Cultural differences can make judgments about what is appropriate very difficult. Teachers sometimes ask more of parents than they can provide. If parents are asked to read more to their child, for example, it may be necessary for the teacher to provide appropriate books. Just asking the parents to read more is not enough if the parents do not have the time or resources to find books. In some cases the parent may not be able to read.

Parents need information about how oral language develops. Too often they may push too hard or think that language can be taught directly, rather than indirectly through expansions, paying attention to the meaning of words, and enriching the child's language environment. Like staff, parents need to understand the processes of language development and how to observe these processes in their children. As they observe more, pay more attention to language, they will "see" more and be able to be more involved in the process of assessment.

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Assessing Language Development in Bilingual Preschool Children

As more and more children enter early childhood education programs with limited proficiency in English, it becomes important for caregivers to know how to assess children's language development. This is no easy matter because children learning English as a second language come from many different circumstances and their development follows a number of different paths. Assessing the child's language development is a very important task for practitioners, especially when we think of assessment as a continual process that goes hand-in-hand with instruction.

Because it is important to consider the various forms that second-language learning can take, this paper begins with a discussion of the child's language background. It goes on to discuss some of the issues in the language development of bilingual children and language assessment. The guide also describes a language assessment procedure developed for the State of California for use with bilingual preschool children.

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